

**TESTIMONY OF
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STAMFORD HEALTH
SUBMITTED TO THE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
Tuesday, February 14, 2023**

Stamford Health appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of **House Bill 6517, An Act Providing Medicaid Coverage for Certified, Registered Dietitian-Nutritionist (RDN) Services Providing Medical Nutrition Therapy.**

Stamford Health is a comprehensive, independent non-profit health care system that serves a region of approximately 650,000 people. We employ more than 3,800 people, making us the largest employer in the city of Stamford and one of the largest in Fairfield County. Beyond the lifesaving care we provide 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, we contribute more than \$1 billion to our state and local economy and provide more than \$106 million in uncompensated care to the residents that need it most. We are committed to providing friendly, personal care coupled with the most sophisticated services to all residents of lower Fairfield County.

House Bill 6517 would require Connecticut's Medicaid program to provide reimbursement for certified, registered dietitian-nutritionist services providing medical nutrition therapy to Medicaid beneficiaries.

The CDC indicates that the national obesity rate is almost 42%. A 2021 DataHaven Community Wellbeing Survey indicates that statewide, Connecticut's obesity rate was 30% – up from 26% in 2015. A 2021 DataHaven survey focusing on Stamford residents estimated a slightly lower obesity rate than the state - 28%. However, 28% represents an increase of six percentage points over a 2015 survey.

When Stamford data is reviewed by race and ethnicity, differences emerge. There is a high percentage of Hispanic individuals who are considered to be obese based on self-reported height and weight. From 2015-2021, the percent of Hispanics in Stamford who qualify as obese rose significantly from 18% to 44%. The percentage of Stamford's Black population over the same time period remained steady at 33%.

This data is concerning as obesity is known to increase the risk of developing several chronic diseases and is associated with higher rates of all-cause mortality and higher rates of mortality due to obesity-related conditions, such as heart disease, stroke, hypertension, and diabetes. Medicaid coverage of medical nutritional

services by would increase access to Connecticut residents of an important tool to combatting obesity and avoiding obesity-related diseases. Dietician-nutritionists help patients set achievable goals through nutrition education and meal planning that initiates weight loss. They help patients in the development of a healthy and nutritious dietary lifestyle that will contribute to a healthy future. Their services will help lower obesity rates in Connecticut, and help residents avoid life-impairing diseases and associated health care costs.

Stamford Health has several resources dedicated to helping individuals avoid obesity and manage obesity-related diseases. We created a medical weight loss program to help meet the needs of our community. We operate a Nutrition Counseling Center. We also lead a collaborative known as Kids FANS (fitness and nutrition services) which promotes childhood wellness, obesity prevention and physical activity for children ages pre-K to high school. Finally, as a core member of the Vita Health and Wellness Initiative, Stamford Health supports Fairgate Farm, an organic farm on the perimeter of its main campus that provides over 8,000 pounds of locally grown produce in our urban environment. The Farm also provides nutrition education to the community. Stamford provides funding for a program offering free fruits and vegetables to Stamford neighbors.

Dietitian-nutritionists provide important preventative care that can help patients avoid terrible diseases that will significantly impact their lives. In addition, this prevention will help reduce health care costs and demand on acute care service in the future.

For the above reasons, **we urge the Human Services Committee to support House Bill 6517.** Thank you for your consideration of our position.